

# MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



## *Office of Public Information*

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### **SUPREME COURT TO ALL CIRCUIT COURTS: CREATE PLANS TO FIND AWOLP CHILDREN**

LANSING, MI, November 19, 2002 – All state circuit courts, not just those that currently have jurisdiction over children absent from court-ordered placements, have been ordered to create plans for reviewing such cases to help find the children.

Administrative Order (AO) 2002-4 was issued by the Michigan Supreme Court today. The courts' plans "must include the establishment of a special docket or other expedited process for review of cases," the order states.

The order may be viewed on the "One Court of Justice" web site at <http://courts.michigan.gov/supremecourt/Resources/Administrative/index.htm#administrative>.

In recent weeks, the Supreme Court has ordered 24 circuit courts to make finding children absent without permission from legal placements (AWOLP) a top priority. That directive was limited to those courts that had jurisdiction over existing cases involving AWOLP children. After the October 31 directive went out from State Court Administrator John D. Ferry, the 24 courts, as of November 12, had helped locate 53 children out of 232 currently listed as AWOLP.

"The purpose of AO 2002-4 is to make sure there are plans in place in all circuit courts, so that each court will be prepared to deal with these cases swiftly," said Ferry.

In Michigan, the family division of circuit court is entrusted with protecting the welfare of children who are under its jurisdiction. This includes thousands of victims of abuse or neglect who are placed by court order in a variety of environments, such as foster care, to ensure their safety.

Today's order states that "Recently, there have been reports of several hundred children in Michigan who are absent from court-ordered placements without permission from the court. In some situations, the child has run away. Other times, especially in the case of younger children, there has been an abduction, often by a family member.

“Regardless of the reason, there can be no justification for the unauthorized disappearance from court-ordered placement of even one child,” the order continues.

In addition to establishing special dockets or other expedited review processes, the circuit courts are ordered to:

- Identify the judge who has responsibility for ensuring compliance with the plan;
- Address the coordination of the efforts of the Family Independence Agency and the court to locate AWOLP children;
- Describe the process for reviewing such cases;
- Address any special problems that the court has identified;
- Describe the court’s procedures for obtaining information regarding the whereabouts of AWOLP children and for promptly scheduling hearings to determine their legal status;
- Describe the court’s procedures for giving priority to cases involving children ages 15 and younger, particularly if the child may have been abducted.

The order calls for the courts to submit their plans to the State Court Administrative Office by February 1, 2003.

Absent children are featured on the FIA Child Locator web site at [www.michigan.gov/fia](http://www.michigan.gov/fia). Anyone with information about a child featured on the web site can call the toll-free Tip Line at 1-866-729-0026.

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